2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

262 and so have two or three dishes on tap. Whatever the origin of
264 the prejudice, they stick to it fairly constantly even when adopting European foods. Natives, and in particular children, who have the opportunity to buy groceries in urban districts, will sit down at a counter and eat half a pound of sugar at a time, not keeping it to sprinkle over other foods. It remains to be seen how long this habit will last in contact with civilization.

Bemba Dietetic Theory.

261 Besides their general ideas as to what a meal should consist of,
827 the Bemba have definite views as to the effects of eating and drinking. Savage theories of digestion probably vary from area to area as widely as do their ideas regarding procreation, although we have little comparative information on the subject at the moment. The Trobriand islanders, according to Malinowski, eat for the pleasure it gives them, and are entirely unaware that their health and strength depend on the process.[1] The Bemba are more realistic. They are quite convinced that food is eaten to give them physical energy, and recognize the weakening effects of any deficiency. Accustomed to an annual seasonal shortage, they reckon to postpone certain heavy agricultural tasks until they feel they have recovered from the previous weeks of underfeeding, and the greater the scarcity, the longer the delay. Natives whom I asked in June why they had not yet started to clear the bush for their gardens[2] answered, 'We are waiting till the millet is ripe and we have begun to eat again—until our arms have grown strong.' A young man whom I had laughed at for not weeding his garden in the early spring shrugged his shoulders, and merely answered in explanation, 'February'. Shortage is so commonly expected at this time of year that the mere mention of the name of the month was considered quite a sufficient excuse for the lapse. The connexion between diet, and diet of a particular sort, and energy is

[1] B. Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, 1935, vol. i, pp. 226–8, also *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922, pp. 168–72. It is significant that this is an area where food is plentiful, and where its accumulation and exchange is one of the chief economic and social ambitions of every man in the community. 'We shall eat, and eat till we vomit', the Trobriander's dream of contentment, has therefore particular sociological significance in this society. The situation is different among the Bemba.

[2] April or May would have been the more usual time to start this work. It will be seen from Chapters XV and XVIII that the hardest agricultural work actually coincides with the end of the hunger months.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

not likely to pass unnoticed in an area in which seasonal changes are so pronounced. There are also a series of words, such as *lushingwa*, 'the giddiness of a man who is hungry', which describe the different effects underfeeding is recognized as producing.

The relation between food and a fat body is dimly recognized, although it has been stated that very few Bemba put on much weight except adolescent girls and some old chiefs. I have heard one or two natives say that food made flesh and that a man who drank much beer would grow fat, but I do not think that diet alone is held responsible for such a condition. A fat body is considered a sign of prosperity and also a state of good luck. Wasting (*ukuonda*) is recognized as a form of illness, but there is nearly always the assumption that this state is due to witchcraft or the revenge of a haunting spirit, whereas a fat and shining body shows the reverse. It betokens the man of substance and success who has kept the forces of darkness at bay, as well as the man who is well fed. There is, therefore, a definite association between the idea of plenty, a well-covered body, and the protection from sorcery. (Cf. also foot-note, p. 58.)

Most natives will give quite a full account of the digestive system. Their theory is based on anatomical knowledge derived from cutting up animals, plus their own subjective sensations during and after eating. Thus they will describe the passage of food from the mouth to the stomach (*icifu*), the intestines (*malo*), the rectum (*inufwinga*), and its ejection as faeces (*amafi*), although they are unaware of the functions of the liver or the pancreas. But in speaking of the digestion of different foods they lay the greatest stress on the factors of which their direct personal experience has made them aware. These are chiefly three: the ease with which the foods are swallowed; the sensations they produce in the stomach, i.e. whether they melt quickly inside (*ukusunguluka*) or remain hard (*ukukosa pa munda*) or give a pain (*ukukalipa pa munda*); or whether they have good lasting power, that is to say, whether a long time elapses between the meal and the next pangs of hunger. Foods recognized as being slow to digest or 'remaining hard in the stomach' are often described as having greater lasting power than those which 'melt' quickly.

All Bemba grade their different foodstuffs in order of preference, and it is probably the habit of eating one relish at a time which enables them to do so with such clarity. The European cannot

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

262
827

easily describe what he feels after eating peas, as distinct from beans, or how long each particular food will last him, but the Bemba in many cases can. After a complete change of diet, for instance, two days of meat-eating after a long period of vegetable food, he will give a most concrete and convincing account of what he believes to be going on inside him and state whether he appreciates the concomitant sensations or not. Thus a man praising porridge made of millet flour often says, 'If you have eaten your fill with *ubwali* you do not get hungry quickly again as with other foods.' He seems to appreciate the feelings in his stomach and elsewhere which the eating of porridge gives. Any one who habitually bolts the coarse heavy millet *ubwali* at the rate which the Bemba do, probably becomes accustomed to a particular sensation of tension inside. To the European this would amount almost to a pain, but it is evident that the Bemba want to feel full in just this particular way, and do not feel satisfied unless they have reached this state. Other flours, such as maize or cassava, produce a different sensation according to him. They are softer and 'melt quicker inside'. They are more suitable for invalids, but they do not give a man strength (*amaka*) or prevent hunger from seizing him quickly after the meal. Bemba, after leaving their country to work in urban areas to the south, say they find it difficult to adjust themselves to the maize flour 'mealie meal' they are given there. One old man, probably too fixed in his gastric habits to become adapted to town life, said, 'Yes, first I ate through one bag of flour and then a second. Then at last I said, "Well, there it is! There is no food to be found among the Europeans. Their foods are light"' (lit. 'small').[1] In the same way the Bemba representative sent over to England recently for the Coronation ceremony declared himself delighted by London, but complained that he had never felt full during the trip, in spite of the fact that he was housed at an army barracks and presumably ate ordinary army food. The reverse phenomenon is seen in the case of a Bemba child born in the copper belt and brought home to his mother's village in the country at about five years old. He refused the *ubwali* they gave him for several days, crying because it was tasteless, but also because it was rough and gave him a pain.

The accessory foods are also valued according to their lasting qualities. If maize is not considered as satisfying as millet, it is

[1] *Kanshi tapali fyakulya pali Basungu. Filyo fyabo fili finono.*

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

262
827

said by natives to be far superior to the various gourds and pumpkins which form the alternative food at the same season of the year. Of a daughter who returned ill from a visit to relatives where grain was scarce, her mother said, 'Yes, of course she is tired. Hasn't she been sitting munching pumpkins with her grandmother?' Sweet potatoes are ranked after maize, but above gourds. Of the legumes, ground-nuts and ground-beans are described as having 'strength which exceeds that of other seed', and mushrooms and other relishes cooked with ground-nuts are said to last longer than when eaten alone. Neither mushrooms nor wild spinach are thought to give much energy. 'A man can't dig on mushrooms, can he?' I heard a man explain to a critic of his gardening activities during the months when these were the chief form of food available. The cow-pea is supposed to last longer than the bean, which in its turn is better than the European pea. Peas are described as tasting nicer than beans, 'but you get hungry again before three o'clock if you have eaten at midday'. Leaf relishes (*umusalu*) are all reckoned less nourishing than dried beans or peas. One of the best ways of staving off hunger is to eat the dish known as *icitata* (cf. Appendix A) a hard dry cake made of various legumes. Mothers say that if they give this to a child during the hunger season and then ask it to drink water so that the 'food swells inside', it will not feel the pangs of hunger for a long time. This statement illustrates clearly the Bemba theory as to what may be considered a nourishing food.

262

Like a number of other African peoples the Bemba have a prejudice against eating raw vegetables, and only cook fresh greens during a few months of the year.[1] They eat nothing raw except the small indigenous cucumbers (*ifibimbi*) and sometimes *umupundu* and *umusuku* fruits, and teachers in European schools have found it difficult to introduce the eating of raw lettuce and tomatoes. This prejudice seems to be based partly on habit among a people who are prevented by the shortness of the annual rainy season from eating fresh food all the year round; partly also they have a definite feeling that cooked food is superior to raw. Such an eating habit seems to be very persistent. Dr. Monica Hunter tells me that the Nyakusa tribe in Tanganyika generally eat their

[1] Cf. the experience of the Rand mine managements that it is necessary to chop up vegetables very finely indeed and mix them in a stew in order to avoid their removal by the native employees.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

262 vegetables fresh since they live in an area with a more or less continuous rainfall. On the other hand, one of the neighbouring [171] groups, a branch of the Ngoni tribe which trekked up north to this district from a rainless area in South Africa, continues to dry and store most of their vegetables although it is plainly no longer necessary for them to do so.

262 753 827 A good many foods are recognized as causing digestive troubles, but not necessarily avoided on that account. Hiccoughs, heartburn, sickness, stomach pains, and diarrhoea are all considered possible results of wrong feeding, although these symptoms may point to other troubles as well. For instance, forms of syphilis (*akaswende*) are believed to be due to 'things that are bad and black in the stomach' (*ifintu fibi fyafita ku munda*), and thought to be cured by strong emetics which cause the patient to vomit up the evil matter. But in so far as diet is responsible for ill health, a native will admit in cold blood that bad food, sour porridge, a sudden excess of meat, or fresh maize eaten off the cob, will produce 'pain over the heart', even though when the time comes he will not be proof against the temptation to eat them. In most cases he may have nothing better to eat, or may feel loath to throw away anything remotely speaking edible. Even an educated Bemba defended the use of putrefying meat by saying, 'Yes, it will give me diarrhoea, but that will be better than throwing the meat away'. When the new maize ripens, the people bolt the cooked grain, stripping four or five cobs at a time. I have seen them sit rocking to and fro with indigestion saying, 'Yes, it hurts on the heart, but we are glad because we are saved from hunger. The new food has come.' Natives say that sick people and children should be given gruel (*umusunga*) and soft food instead of *ubwali*, but the latter at any rate eat what they want. Gastric troubles are bound to be received with greater resignation than in our community in an area where alternative diets for weak digestions practically do not exist.

Tastes, Cravings, and Preferences.

262 Apart from grading their foodstuffs in the order of what they believe to be their nutritive value, the Bemba recognize linguistically certain tastes, and also definite cravings for specific foods probably associated with the deficiencies in their diet.

(*a*) *Tastes.* Bemba foods are not highly flavoured. Of some